1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-5 (1907-1908) 1911
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CHAPTER VIII

MAGIC

In the chapters upon religion we have described those ceremonies and observances of the Veddas which depend for their efficacy upon the successful appeal to some extra-human personal influence. In this section we shall discuss a number of actions which we consider magical, that is, actions which are expected to produce the required result automatically by virtue of their own intrinsic qualities.

One of the first things we noted during our stay in the Vedda country was the very slight part which magic played in the life of the Veddas. The more we saw of the people the more convinced we became of this. It seems to us that among the uncontaminated Veddas of two or three generations ago magical practices were almost entirely absent, and even at the present day the few remaining Veddas who have not been much exposed to foreign influence have scarcely any customs that are truly magical.

We include in this chapter the custom which formerly existed of eating a small piece of human liver in times of great stress, for even if this custom be not considered magical in the strict sense, it is clearly based on principles which lie at the root of many magical beliefs.

Since it is important to make thoroughly clear the absence of many forms of magic, we shall consider the condition of the different communities with regard to some of the most commonly occurring forms.

MAGIC DIRECTED AGAINST THE INDIVIDUAL.

This is completely absent except among the village Veddas, which is all the more surprising in view of the extraordinary

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success in honey gathering, the shaman asked us for two strings of beads. These beads he placed over betel leaves upon two arrows thrust in the centre of the dancing ground which were surrounded by betel leaves offered to the *yaka*. These beads were said to represent the rough rope of creeper with which the green twigs forming the smoker were secured and the rope by which the smoker was lowered to the comb.

When it is remembered that Veddas do not tattoo or paint themselves, and have never been seen wearing any kind of seeds as ornaments, it seems reasonable to assume that where beads are sought after by the Veddas they are valued for their supposed magical properties.

In conclusion we may give the only perfectly clear instance of a Vedda wearing an amulet with which we are acquainted. The shaman of Bandaraduwa wore on his wrist a small silver cylinder such as is commonly used to contain a written charm. The cylinder was empty and had never contained a charm, but the shaman told us that he wore it in order to be cured of an illness from which he had suffered formerly, and that presently he would give the cylinder to some pilgrim proceeding to Kataragam in order that he might deposit it in the temple there.

The Eating of Human Liver.

Every group of Veddas except the most sophisticated village Veddas believe that it was formerly the custom for a man to carry in his betel pouch a small piece of dry human liver. But the majority of our informants were not clear as to the exact reason for doing this, though they were all agreed that it had something to do with raising a man's valour and making him strong to bear trouble. It was essential that the liver should be taken from a man killed by the individual who proposed to carry a portion of the dried liver in his pouch. When a man had been killed the slayer would open his belly and take out a small portion of his liver which he would dry in the sun in a secret place. This custom appears to have ceased about three generations ago, but the following instance, said to have occurred about fifty years ago, was given us at Bandaraduwa.

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The headman of a small group of Kovil Vanamai Veddas killed a Sinhalese simply because he required a piece of human liver to keep in his betel pouch. In spite of this example the Bandaraduwa people could not tell us exactly how it was used, and it was only at Sitala Wanniya that it was ascertained that the purpose of the dried liver was to make men strong and confident to avenge insults. A man would bite off a piece of the dried liver and chew it, saying to himself: "I have killed this man; why should I not be strong and confident and kill this other one who has insulted me?" As far as we could understand a Vedda might thus work himself up into a condition of berserker fury, but this was only done after very serious insult, as when a man's wife had been carried off or been unfaithful, or when his bow and arrows had been stolen or an attempt made to take his land or caves[1].

[1] It was doubtless an exaggerated account of this practice that led Gillings to accuse the Veddas of cannibalism (*Journ. Roy. As. Soc., Ceylon Branch*, 1853).